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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000638

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GH](#) [GOG](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS OPPOSITION NDC LEADER JOHN ATTA MILLS

Classified By: Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater for reasons 1.5 d and e
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11. (C) Summary: On March 7, Ambassador met with Professor John Evans Atta Mills, former Vice President and two-time presidential candidate for the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) party. Mills deliberately but firmly criticized the ruling NPP government as corrupt and vindictive. If selected as the NDC candidate for the 2008 election (which he expects), he would boycott the election if overseas Ghanaians are allowed to vote, in accordance with the recently passed Representation of the People law (ROPAL). Politics is deeply divided along partisan and ethnic lines in Ghana, he said. Ambassador agreed the overseas voting had to be done fairly and urged Mills and the NDC to find a way to maintain dialogue with the NPP. End summary.

Overall Distrust for the NPP

12. (C) Professor Mills told Ambassador he reached out in good faith to cooperate with the new NPP government when it came in power in 2000. However, within his first month of office, President Kufuor threw a number of NDC activists in jail and came to Mills' house with armed men to interrogate his wife, he said. Kufuor has never called him and he avoids any contact with the President. He reiterated once again that the Kufuor government is marked by corruption and cronyism and the average Ghanaian is unhappy. He contended that the NPP stole the 2004 election but that he has not made a big issue out of election irregularities because "we want peace and can ill afford disintegration."

Angry with the ROPA Law

13. (C) Mills told Ambassador the Representation of the People (Amendment) law (ROPAL) is "a recipe for rigging elections...signed into law with indecent haste." (Note: ROPAL allows all Ghanaians residing abroad to vote in Ghana's elections. End note.) There is no level playing field, he said, noting that the NPP has already been campaigning abroad, aided by official travel and state resources. The NDC does not believe GOG Ambassadors can impartially administer overseas balloting and the party lacks funds for candidates to travel abroad or for party agents to be at every overseas voting site. Mills voiced concerns about possible fraud in Ghanaian passports and identity cards, which threaten the credibility of absentee voting.

14. (C) The Electoral Commission (EC) had not yet met with the NDC to discuss the bill. The EC's technical difficulties in past elections suggest that it needs to administer several more domestic elections before Ghana is ready for overseas balloting, Mills alleged. Mills believes he will be the NDC flagbearer again in 2008 but said he would boycott the election if overseas voting is allowed, in accordance with the ROPAL.

Polarized Politics

15. (C) Politics is very polarized and ethnically divided, Mills said, adding that the current "Great Ashanti project is terrifying." (note: President Kufuor is an ethnic Ashanti, as are many at the top levels of his government. End note.) He would try to hold the country together, but "the time comes when the people you lead take over," he said.

Ambassador Urges Dialogue

16. (C) Ambassador stated it was important for all Ghanaians to see a democracy dividend. Ghana needs a strong opposition and the NDC has to find ways to engage and dialogue with the NPP in a responsible and productive way. The United States has had overseas voting for years, but it is important to ensure such a voting process is fair and implemented in consultation with all parties. Politicians should put the better interests of Ghana above their party and ethnic divisions, she said. Mills affirmed that the USG has influence over the GOG and said he would continue to seek dialogue with the NPP.

Comment

17. (C) Although soft-spoken, Mills is prone to speak in dramatic phrases, both publicly and privately. In a conversation with PolChief six months ago, Mills also claimed the 2004 election was rigged and said the NDC would boycott the 2008 election if the ROPA bill is passed. Some of this rhetoric is probably aimed at countering critics within the NDC who view him as too mild mannered and conciliatory. Nonetheless, his views about ROPAL and Ghana's polarized politics reflect a broad-based sentiment in the NDC and in other opposition parties (septel). An opposition boycott of the 2008 election seems unlikely at this point. Unfortunately, however, like others in his party, Mills is unable to articulate an alternate plan that would move Ghana beyond the current confrontation over ROPAL.

BRIDGEWATER